Ministry of Education
Ontario

Report to the Minister of Education the Hon. Thomas L. Wells of the Work Group on Evaluation and Reporting

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PREAMBLE

On Friday, 26 November 1976, the Minister of Education, The Honourable Thomas L. Wells, announced in the Legislature the formation of a Work Group on Evaluation and Reporting. The Minister requested the Work Group to report as soon as possible after the end of March, 1977, with

> a definite plan of action on how best to improve testing and evaluation in the classroom and how best to give teachers and parents a clear understanding of how their children are progressing. (Statement, 26 November 1976)

The Work Group was composed of seven members appointed by the Ontario Teachers' Federation, two members from the Ontario Association of Education Administrative Officials, and four members from the Research and Evaluation Branch of the Ministry of Education.

The Chairman appointed by the Minister was Mrs. Claudette Foisy-Moon, Executive Assistant, Ontario Teachers' Federation.

The members were:

Mr. Ross Andrew, President, Ontario Teachers' Federation; on leave from the Ottawa Board of Education, OTF

Mrs. Debra Richardson, teacher, Camilla Road Senior Public School, Mississauga, FWTAO

Mr. Roger Desgroseilliers, teacher, Ecole Secondaire Algonquin, North Bay, AEFO

Mrs. Edna Gannon, principal, St. Gregory School, Oshawa, OECTA

Mr. Jack Cronin, Vice President, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Toronto; teacher, South Lincoln High School, Smithville, OSSTF

Mr. Jack Lever, English Consultant, Etobicoke Board of Education, Etobicoke, OPSMTF

Mr. Emerson Lavender, Director of Education, Halton Board of Education, Burlington, OAEAO

Mr. Frank Fowler, Superintendent of Schools, Frontenac-Lennox and Addington Roman Catholic Separate School Board, Kingston, OAEAO

Mr. Douglas Penny, Director, Research and Evaluation Branch, Ministry of Education

Mr. Lloyd Thompson, Research and Evaluation Branch, Ministry of Education

Mr. Jacques Giroux, Research and Evaluation Branch, Ministry of Education

Mr. Ian McHaffie, Research and Evaluation Branch, Ministry of Education

Since November, the Work Group has met for twenty-five days; sub-group meetings have been held, and members have travelled to centres in the United States and Canada. Many programs of evaluation have been reviewed, reports and background papers read, and points of view argued.

Due to the limitations of time imposed by the reporting date, only a summative view can be given. It is hoped that further study will be carried out by the Ministry. A recommendation as to the composition of the proposed group and nature of the study is made in the report.

The Work Group is grateful to the Minister for his cooperation and encouragement in the task. This has been expressed by the cooperation and assistance of the Research and Evaluation Branch through the Branch members on the Work Group and the clerical staff who arranged travel and provided typing and phone services. Miss Joan Pipher has been a most welcome and helpful assistant.

The members are appreciative of the cooperation of the boards of education and the Ontario Teachers' Federation.

BACKGROUND

During the course of the Work Group's examination of the issues in evaluation, it has spent considerable time studying the procedures and experience of other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States. Province-wide evaluation is at a developmental stage in Canada. State-wide testing programs are and have been used for many years in the majority of the states of the USA.

It became clear that in the American programs (with the exception of the National Assessment of Educational Progress) evaluation was comprised exclusively of student testing at the state level. There was little evidence of concerted effort whereby the results of such testing either were coordinated with other sources of evaluative data or contributed to policy formation at the state level, even though frequently the testing was mandated through the state legislature.

In most cases, state testing aims at assessing minimal skills or performance levels. In the absence of state curriculum guidelines the impact of such testing on curricula could be harmful if the requirements reflect minimal performance alone.

One major problem that constantly recurs is that data gleaned from state-wide testing are used for purposes whose legitimacy can be questioned such as the direct comparison of schools, boards, and administrative officials. These comparisons are often too facile. They are assumed to reflect school effectiveness, and ignore equally relevant background factors

such as the nature of the community, facilities, clientele, and funding.

It is the stated aim of many of these testing programs that they be diagnostic. However, factors such as a lengthy turnaround time for the return of results to schools, very broad and general frames of reference, and the minimal skills level referred to above reduce their diagnostic value.

While examining the practices of these jurisdictions, it was part of the procedure to speak informally and ask advice of those responsible for the administration of the programs. The repeated admonition was not to attempt too much with a single program. Individual diagnosis of students, testing to establish regional or provincial norms of performance, monitoring provincial performance to meet accountability needs, and screening students for university admission are all different purposes and require different means.

While a complete evaluation system must therefore be multi-faceted and consist of many programs, it is essential that provision be made for the systematic and concerted analysis of the information obtained from these programs and its use in policy development at all levels.

Further problems were noted in regard to two specific curriculum areas. In the primary and junior areas most statewide tests conducted are written tests of a multiple choice nature. What influence this has on primary and junior curriculum and on the evaluation of children in these areas is rarely questioned. In the Ontario context, the Work Group had serious concerns about the extent to which such tests could

adequately evaluate the success of either individual students or the program as a whole with respect to the objectives outlined in The Formative Years.

In many jurisdictions studied, secondary school graduation was linked to the attainment of minimal skill levels in basic areas. The Work Group, however, believes that even in those areas where the policy has been in effect for some time, the issue is not satisfactorily resolved. While superficially this policy might be attractive to some points of view in Ontario, its common result is either to create a low rate of attainment of graduating diplomas by setting the standards too high, or to have little or no effect because the demands are too low. Indeed, those current studies to which this Group had access (including the Interface report) indicate that the secondary schools of this province still provide the best prediction of post-secondary performance. The Work Group is therefore supportive of the present Ministry policy with respect to graduating diplomas, and recommends no change in the basic philosophy that underlies it. The Group does recognize the special problems of admission to post-secondary education, but believes that these should be resolved as a result of discussion between the secondary and post-secondary educational communities and not as the consequence of a revised scheme of provincial program evaluation.

Large-scale testing as it now operates in many states appears to rest on the premise that the school system will not discharge its obligations unless constantly subject to external assessment. We do not believe that anything in the Ontario

context supports this view, and therefore reject any form of large-scale provincial assessment stemming from this premise and following the pattern we observed in other jurisdictions.

In rejecting this form of assessment, the Group does not deny the value of large-scale provincial assessment conducted as part of a broad program of evaluation of particular policies and programs at the provincial level. Each policy initiative should have evaluative measures specified in advance. In some instances, these may well include assessments of student achievement on a provincial basis conducted at appropriate times and with appropriate instruments.

THE REPORT

In making this report the Work Group has addressed the areas of evaluation, testing, and reporting. It must be stated that we are very reluctant to separate testing from evaluation. From the beginning of the deliberations there has been unanimous acceptance of the principle that testing is only one component of the total evaluation of the student. It is our belief that accountability for the educational system in Ontario should not rest solely, or even predominantly, on student performance, but on a total evaluation of the policies, programs, and administrative and reporting practices at all levels.

EVALUATION

For the purpose of this report, evaluation is defined as the making of judgements about educational practices and outcomes; such judgements are dependent upon the analysis and interpretation of relevant information gathered by appropriate means.

The objectives of any evaluation program in order of priority should be:

1. To provide information for the improvement of programs, either directly or through the improvement of policies affecting programs
   a) at the individual student and classroom level
   b) at the school board level
   c) at the provincial level.
2. To provide the basis for reporting the progress of the student to the student and the parents.
3. To provide information as the basis of internal (school and system) reporting on the extent to which local program objectives are being met.
4. To provide information about the extent to which provincial objectives are being met.
5. To provide information that will lead towards an examination of the validity of objectives at any level.
6. To assist in meeting the accountability requirement at all levels.

STUDENT EVALUATION

It is primarily the teacher who has the major responsibility of evaluating the student and the classroom program. The student evaluation rests on the analysis of relevant information obtained from various types of assessment. In assessing student achievement, it is understood that no set of objectives is equally valid for all students in a group, and that each student progresses at his own rate. Furthermore, while a particular objective may be valid, it is possible that it cannot be either measured or recorded statistically. And even when that objective is measurable, there are individual student needs which must be taken into account.

Given the above, the purposes of any student evaluation program should be as follows:

1. To diagnose individual student needs, thereby providing the basis for continuation, remediation, or enrichment.
2. To use the results of the evaluation as a basis for feedback to the student on his progress.
3. To provide meaningful data for reporting the student's individual progress to the parent and to the school principal.
4. To provide the basis for recommendation of student placement, student promotion, and diplomas.

In the process of student evaluation the teacher collects a variety of information. Some of these sources are of a statistical nature, such as the results of teacher-made tests, objective-referenced tests, and norm-referenced tests. Other sources include teacher observation, summaries of student/

teacher and parent/teacher interviews, and samples of students' work.

To evaluate a classroom program, the teacher must decide whether the objectives of that program have been met, and whether they are valid.

SCHOOL EVALUATION

For the purposes of this report, the school means the principal in consultation with the teachers according to a collegial model.

The school, then, has a responsibility for the evaluation of the school program in terms of student needs and society's expectations as expressed in board policy and provincial curriculum guidelines. A well-articulated school evaluation program will provide proper diagnosis so that remediation and enrichment can be arranged.

In order to evaluate a school program the principal and the staff use both the results of in-school assessments of student achievement and the results of appropriate standardized tests. Both of these types of assessment should reflect as closely as possible the objectives of the program. This kind of evaluation should also draw on additional information such as an examination of program outlines or courses of study, of learning resources, of the use of staff, and so on.

These data, in conjunction with relevant socio-economic and ethnographic information, can provide a good basis for evaluation and modification of school programs.

SCHOOL BOARD

The school board has the responsibility to establish policy and regulations relevant to the evaluation procedures for the programs, staff, and operations within its jurisdiction. A board evaluation program should assess the effectiveness of its operations and the achievement of board and provincial objectives, and determine financial accountability in terms of policy direction.

To accomplish these objectives, the board makes use of such information as an analysis of the system's needs, statements of the achievement of pre-determined curriculum objectives, results of board-designed testing programs, and judgements and recommendations from the professional staff. This information is provided to the board from school system summaries, research data, provincial and board curriculum recommendations, analysis of staff resources, teacher surveys, responses from the community, and other like sources. The Ministry's program for cooperative review provides a mechanism for periodically conducting an integrated system-wide evaluation based on these inputs.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, through the Minister, to maintain quality in education and to assure the province of the consistency of that quality.

The recommendations that follow this chapter are the ways that the Ministry might carry out this responsibility.

It is recommended that:

1. Any evaluation program be based on objectives which are derived from a provincial needs assessment program, which are clearly delineated in provincial curriculum guidelines, and which are rendered specific at the local jurisdictional level by broadly-based advisory committees of practising educators.
2. There be clear, concise directions specifying the kind of information required for evaluation to provide for accountability at the relevant level of the educational system.
3. Every curriculum committee, whether board or Ministry, have as part of its responsibility to develop criteria whereby the effectiveness of the guideline may be evaluated.
4. The Ministry continue to conduct periodic, systematic reviews of its curriculum guidelines, linking such reviews to any other major policy considerations. These reviews should be based on the widest possible range of relevant evaluative information.
5. The Ministry encourage evaluation programs which provide for the early identification of the exceptional child (particularly of the child with learning disabilities) so that programs may be devised to provide for his individual needs.
6. The Ministry request boards to furnish the results of local evaluation activities and the data on which these

are based, as a part of the information-gathering for a provincial assessment.

7. The Ministry strongly encourage boards to develop an evaluation policy, to review annually their evaluation, testing, and reporting procedures, and to modify them if necessary.

8. Any steps taken to improve evaluation practice include attention to record-keeping, as the keeping and use of records is important in the evaluation of students' progress.

TESTING

Standardized testing should not be approached separately from evaluation in its broadest contexts. It is merely one component of a total evaluation process at both local and provincial levels. Unfortunately, its use as the sole or major determinant of student performance for rendering accountability to the public has been overpublicized.

To evaluate the progress of either an individual student or a group of students, reference must be made to the goals and specific objectives of a program, unit, or course. These objectives must therefore be specified with sufficient precision to permit the development of tests and other strategies of evaluation that relate closely and directly to them.

There are two major purposes for testing students. One is to obtain data on the achievement levels of a given student population as a basis for rendering accountability and making decisions. The other and more important purpose is to obtain data that will facilitate the teaching/learning process. These two purposes must be met by different test instruments and testing strategies. The diagnosis of individual difficulties and the assessment of the achievement of groups of students require different methodologies, and care must be taken that misleading data not be generated by confusing them.

Both the Minister and the local school board are accountable for the quality of education in their respective jurisdictions. The use of standardized tests is one means of measuring certain aspects of that quality of education. Test technology has advanced sufficiently, perhaps, to warrant their use on a care-

fully selective basis, although some weaknesses must be noted: there are at present no available shelf tests that cover the full range of the provincial guidelines in current use; nor has there been sufficient attention paid to the importance of and the training in test interpretation. Work must be continued in the development of testing instruments that are valid and reliable in relation to Ontario objectives, and in the clarification and interpretation of the results.

When the purpose of testing is to facilitate the teaching/learning process at the classroom level, the tests should be diagnostic in nature and related to existing program objectives. Such instruments in the form of complete tests or banks of test items should be available for use by teachers at all grade levels where the need and usefulness can be demonstrated.

When testing is found appropriate in the evaluation of provincial programs, it should not be limited to core or basic subjects. Rather should all programs with provincial guidelines be monitored from time to time as the need arises. In this type of testing, sampling procedures can be used that will ensure that the results are used only for the purposes intended.

The development of testing programs and of testing instruments should be a cooperative effort among appropriate representative groups.

It is recommended that:

1. Any direct provincial testing of student achievement be conducted only as an element in provincial program review and confined to curriculum objectives that are well-defined and uniform throughout the province.
2. There be developed a bank of specific objectives and corresponding test items and instruments based on curriculum objectives that would be available to teachers for their use in the diagnostic testing of students.
3. The Ministry provide assistance to school boards which may wish to develop local testing programs. Where such assistance leads to the production of new items or instruments, the sharing of these with other jurisdictions in the province should be expected.
4. Research findings in the areas of test validity, test development, and test use be summarized and published by the Research and Evaluation Branch of the Ministry.
5. When tests are used as part of the process of program evaluation, every effort be made to have such tests go beyond the most easily tested areas (ie the lower level cognitive skills) and examine as many other types of objectives (ie affective, or higher cognitive) as possible.
6. In view of the fact that standardized testing should be only a part of a broader program of evaluation, the results of standardized tests alone not be used as the basis for promotion.
7. As research suggests that pencil and paper standardized

tests have limited value in the primary division, their use at that level not be encouraged.

8. Both pre-service and in-service professional education stress the proper use and interpretation of the results of diagnostic tests.

REPORTING

It is a major responsibility of the educational system to report on its progress. This obligation must be met by all levels of the system and must take place according to well-articulated plans that are understood in advance. In all contexts, the reporting should touch upon both areas of strength and areas needing improvement. The transmittal and discussion of information in a two-way process and the consideration of follow-up plans are essential parts of reporting.

The teacher reports to the student in order to provide information about his achievement that will help the student plan future activity; this should also give encouragement to the student and help him develop the skills of self-evaluation. The student receives frequent, informal reports which can be self-initiated or initiated by the teacher. Such reports stress constructive information delivered within the appropriate degree of privacy. Information conveyed to the student in this way must be consistent with information conveyed to the parent.

The teacher reports to the parent to provide information regarding the student's progress relative to:

1. potential, motivation, aspirations, and other individual differences;
2. program objectives which are explained to the parent;
3. appropriate comparison groups.

The elements of reporting between teacher and parent include written reports and interviews in both formal and informal contexts. The teacher conveys information clearly, trying to

leave no doubt in the mind of the parent as to the state of the student's progress. Such reporting emphasizes openness of communication.

The teacher reports to the principal and other teachers to provide the type of information that permits planning a program with continuity and appropriate teaching strategies. Good in-school reporting requires the maintenance of student records. These records should contain current and complete information, and the teachers concerned should be allowed the examination and use of those data. Open communication within the school and between schools is crucial to good reporting.

A school reports to parents and the school board. To parents it reports on school and system objectives, school programs, and its evaluation procedures. Included in the school's reporting system there should be provision for receiving parental opinion on the quality of the school's program. To the board the school (through the principal) reports according to board and administrative policies and procedures and relevant Provincial Acts and Regulations.

The board reports to the public in order to provide general information on the programs, operations, and finance of the board, and to provide background information against which the public can interpret data relating to local schools. Good board reporting might involve drawing attention to the perceived needs of the community, a clear articulation of the programs designed to fulfil those needs, and an annual report on the progress of those programs in addition to their financial costs and implications.

The board reports to the Ministry to convey its own educational needs and to contribute to a provincial assessment of educational needs, as well as to meet various statutory requirements. This provincial assessment is dependent in part upon reports of local evaluations of the extent to which provincial objectives are being achieved and of the assessments on which these are based.

The Minister reports to the Legislature and hence to the public on the nature and quality of education throughout the province. Such reporting should be based on an evaluation of the extent to which provincial objectives are being achieved, direct assessments by the Ministry, and compilations of local findings as indicated above.

An important component of reporting at the ministerial level should be the discussion of current problems and the preparation of the profession and the public for measures designed to address them. In addition, further attention should be paid to publicizing existing programs and objectives of the Ministry in forms that are appropriate for the specific audience intended.

It is essential that the Ministry involve itself with the publication and circulation of informed, up-to-date, and positive statements on provincial education. It is important to create an aware and knowledgeable public which can view education in the context of today's society.

It is recommended that:

1. The Ministry develop and carry out a concerted communications program to explain in appropriate ways to all sectors of the public and the educational community the objectives of the provincial educational system, the methods used to achieve them, and the degree to which they have been attained.
2. As part of the above, the Ministry consider mounting a series of public meetings and forums to discuss important educational issues in the light of relevant evaluative and research findings.
3. Particular attention be paid to the involvement of groups in labour, business, and industry with an expressed interest in public education.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING EVALUATION, TESTING, AND REPORTING

It is recommended that:

1. In conjunction with teachers, trustees, and administrative officials, the Ministry develop, publish, and distribute to teachers, manuals, resource guides, handbooks, and information kits on evaluation, testing, and reporting, which describe as comprehensively as possible how each function can be carried out effectively, and how each is applied to divisions or to subject areas: the above to take into account the best of current practice in Ontario.
2. The Ministry and the Ontario Teachers' Federation jointly fund, organize, and conduct in-service professional development for teachers in the areas of evaluation, testing, and reporting.
3. In the training of educational leaders such as principals and supervisory officers, the Ministry ensure that special emphasis is placed on evaluation, testing, and reporting, and especially on the interpretation of results of the first two to the public.
4. A definite allocation of funds and other resources be made by the Ministry to encourage boards to develop in-service training and professional development programs in the fields of evaluation, testing, and reporting.
5. As part of such board programs for the professional development of staff, a definite allocation of time and resources be made within the school day, in order to ensure that the responsibility does not rest on the class-

room teacher alone.

6. The Ministry encourage and assist in developing inter-board sharing of resources and personnel in research and planning in the areas of evaluation, testing, and reporting.

7. The Ministry make every effort to develop programs and resources in the areas of evaluation, testing, and reporting that would take into account the needs of the Francophone students of the province.

8. An advisory committee on evaluation and reporting be established with membership from the provincial organizations representing the major partners in public education to advise the Minister on:

   a) proposed Ministry policy initiatives in the areas of evaluation and reporting;

   b) the general nature of professional development programs and resource documents;

   c) general evaluation policies applying to Ministry curriculum guidelines;

   d) measures for reporting and disseminating evaluative results;

   e) measures affecting standards of educational achievement;

   f) needs assessment in the areas of evaluation and reporting.

9. In view of the need to set evaluation in the broader context of curriculum design, consideration be given to the establishment of an advisory committee with a mandate that would cover both areas.